

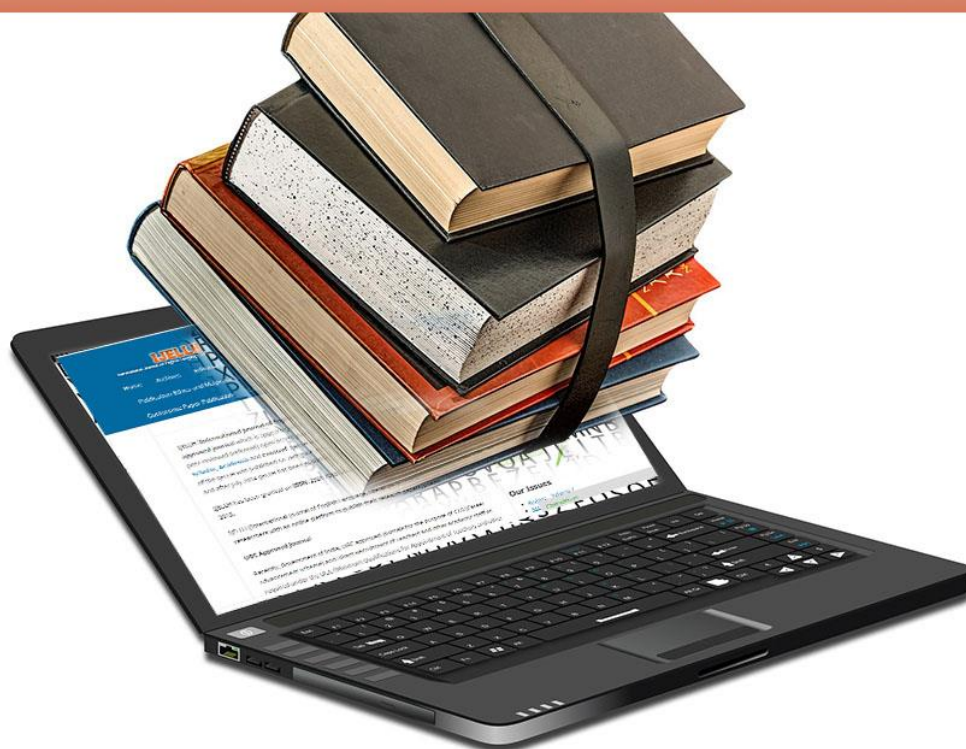
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New Media Travel Narratives: A Triple Deconstruction

Abstract

Travel narratives, as the process of travel unravels newer modes of perceiving mundane realities. Technical advancements transformed the field of travel narratives as it left its mark on every other realm of life. Along with accentuating the accessibility of travelogues, they paved way for the emergence of new travel discourses and were equally destined to be a stock of criticism. This paper is an exploration of how new media travel narratives acts as platforms for a deconstruction of the form, content and culture of travelogues. Three videos titled “World’s Extreme Countries”, “Planet Warriors” and “Eight Days in Real India” by *Nas Daily*, a one-minute video blog are analysed to illustrate how they serve as a medium of triple deconstruction of travel narratives. The form of travelogues was condensed from volumes of

chapters to one-minute videos, the contents both presented and shattered the stereotypes, and provided an insight into the indigenous cultures around the globe.

Travelogues are as old as any literature in the world. Since time immemorial people started traversing terrains transgressing boundaries. In colonised nations, the initial modes of literature were in the form of the jottings on sights and sounds that fascinated the minds of the pioneers. When a person travels to an alien land, a set of preconceived notions about the land too will travel with him/her. However, the experiences of the traveller shatter the preconceptions and open-up new horizons through an exposure to the reality and will eventually result in harmony. "... to begin any journey or, indeed, simply to set foot beyond one's own front door, is quickly to encounter difference and otherness. All journeys are in this way a confrontation with, or more optimistically a negotiation of, what is sometimes termed alterity. Or, more precisely, since there are no foreign peoples with whom we do not share a common humanity, and probably no environment on the planet for which we do not have some sort of prior reference point, all travel requires us to negotiate a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity and identity, difference and similarity." (Thompson, 9)

Deconstruction aims at disturbing the conventional centres of power and knowledge by discovering new domains that leads to a shift in perspective. Deconstruction thus provides a platform to test and alter the stereotypes and prejudices imbibed by an individual. It also opens up new avenues of knowledge that were hitherto unexplored. In this light, travel can be considered as a process of deconstruction.

In the present world of technological boom, everything is in a state of trance; so are travelogues that are accessible to the masses in the form of blogs, e-logs, youtube channels, facebook stories, and many more. According to Gretzel, Fesenmaier and O'Leary, travellers use the internet for a wide variety of tasks depending upon the stage of the trip. It

simplified, hastened and radicalised the ways in which travels are planned, executed and recounted. There are many features and advantages that add to the attractiveness of new media travel narratives when compared to conventional travelogues. New media platform alters the pattern of travel narration providing the travellers myriad opportunities to retell their experiences in a more engaging and lively manner. Youtube channels, vlogs, podcasts, facebook and many more allow them to record everything on the spot and share it to the masses. Accessibility and affordability are the most impressive features of these medium. In addition, the recounting of tourism experience plays a significant role in individual and social identity formation processes (Lee, Yoo and Gretzel, 2009; McCabe and Foster, 2006). Travel narratives are expressions of identity and the telling of these narratives is an essential component of social interactions (O'Reilly, 2005; Desforges, 2000; Shaffer, 2001). Moreover, travel narration enables them to thoughtfully arrange their ideas and decipher new meanings out of it. In this manner, it can be regarded as a powerful reflective tool (Pudliner, 2007).

Nas Daily is a travel video blog founded by Nuseir Yassin in 2016 after quitting his 'highpaid' and 'unsatisfying' job to find more meaning to his life by traveling full time around the world. Yassin established his niche among his fellow bloggers by dedicating to make one-minute videos for the next 1000 days, one each day. "We live very busy lives. But everyone has a spare minute", Yassin describes his one- minute videos as the more humane and the best way to reach people in this fast-moving world. His tag line, 'That's one minute see you tomorrow' made his followers to check-in every day and this gave the young blogger a wide range of audience in a very short time.

Yassin choose to visit undiscovered places which most bloggers ignore and reveal the lives of the people that are normally unnoticed. His choice of destinations sets an example for other people to venture into unknown cultures that are different and distinct from the habitually established routines of the normal life and introduce the world to a better way of living and

giving to the planet. He started his thousand-day journey from Kenya and included remote places like Rwanda, Tanzania, and Papua New Guinea to give his audience a broader worldview. The videos are notable for not only gifting a visual experience of interesting aspects about unknown countries but also for providing a fresh perspective on hitherto ignored prejudices and stereotypes. The paper explores the scope of a triple deconstruction of form, content, and culture by analysing a few videos from this channel. The videos selected are “World’s Extreme Countries”, “Planet Warriors” and “8 Days in Real India” for the analysis of form, content, and culture respectively.

“World’s Extreme Countries” is a compilation of five videos about countries that do things in “in an extreme way” (00:11- 00:14). Yassin is said to have taken two long years to come up with such a different video. The countries that are considered are- Iceland (extremely environment friendly), China (extremely fit), Australia (extremely short), Zimbabwe (extremely innovative) and Singapore (extremely clean). As *Nas Daily* is a video blog, the basic format is that of a video that in turn makes use of visual effects and sound effects. The videos are noted for the interesting narration by Yassin and the lively picturisation.

“World’s Extreme Countries” is made up of five one-minute videos. The duration of the videos ie., one minutes or sixty seconds is the most important and interesting aspect of the form. In all his videos Yassin makes efficient usage of sixty seconds to introduce the viewers to a place, highlight its speciality and to shed a different light on it. The facts provided through these videos are not only different but also has social relevance. Yassin endeavours to uphold human and social values through his one-minute videos. For instance, in his video on Iceland from “World’s Extreme Countries”, Yassin demonstrates how the citizens of that region produced vegetables in an eco-friendly manner. In an extremely frozen country like Iceland, they used volcanic water to heat a greenhouse and produced vegetables using green energy. Yassin says that this shows “how humans eat from the planet without hurting the

planet” (01:28- 01:32). This example also illustrates Yassin’s method of substantiating his observations through demonstrations in a force-less manner.

The captivating visuals are one of the most important aspects of *Nas Daily* videos. Within the short span of a minute, the visuals provide a glimpse of the whole place visited by Yassin. He usually opens the narration with an aerial view of the land that gifts an overview of the place to be explored. Yassin uses face shots in his narration. This creates an illusion of face-to-face conversation with the viewer. He uses face shot while capturing the images of the inhabitants of the land too. This helps the viewer to get a clear view of all the interesting facial features of the natives. Yassin usually gives an equal screen space to the populace of the area in his videos.

The sound effects and the narration add on to the quality of visuals in *Nas Daily*. The narration, the voice-over and the background score easily catches the viewer’s attention and also create a feeling of urgency. Yassin makes apt use of the stress, rhythm and rhyme of English language to attract and sustain the interest of his followers. For instance, while explaining the healthy lifestyle maintained by people in China he says, “Here, life ends, only when life really ends” (02:51-02:55). As mentioned earlier, he concludes all his videos with the tagline “That’s one minute, see you tomorrow”. This enables the viewers to appreciate the experience that they could enjoy within a minute. The caption also lends an optimistic promise as in the opening of “World’s Extreme Countries” he says “This will make you appreciate the world a lot more” (00:28-00:30).

“World’s Extreme Countries” thus shows how the form of travelogues are deconstructed in the modern world. The voluminous narrations are shortened to a minute, imaginary journeys of the readers to the lands are made more effective with the help of visuals and sounds. The narration can be considered as an improvement upon the strong oral culture

of travelogues. And moreover, the primacy of writing in travel literature is replaced by visuals and speech in these travel videos.

The content of the videos by *Nas Daily* not only highlights Yassin's travel experience but also upholds human values and social values. They not only lend a perspective about an unknown land but also gives an entirely different perspective on an unexplored aspect. "Planet Warriors" by *Nas Daily* serves as a testimony to all these added advantage of Yassin's videos. His content deconstructs the preconceived notions about the world as a whole. In this video he rings an alarm about the condition of Dead Sea and he says, "The Dead Sea is dying but a lot of humans are trying"(03:28- 03:33). Yassin usually adopts a problem solution method in designing the content of his videos. In "Planet Warriors", he meditated on the fuming environmental issues that chokes the planet and then comes up with some solutions noticed by him. Though the humane values explicated by him in these videos are subjective, he establishes them with numerous examples from around the world.

In "Planet Warriors", to prove that there are indeed many human beings who fought small battles to rebuild this planet, he brings in stories from Denmark (lends out Kayak for collecting trash), Sri Lanka (makes paper from elephant poop), Galapagos (statues out of cigarettes) and many more. These facts are established by him through visuals and they are easily verifiable. The content of *Nas Daily* highlights small elements to show how small efforts can create big changes (like his videos). *Nas Daily* turns its cameras to even remote areas of the world. Though he calls on mighty countries, he attempts to focus on unknown regions in these countries. Therefore, there is a shift from centres of power and obliteration of hegemony in these videos.

Nas Daily many a times delves deep into the culture of the lands visited by Yassin. Such videos offer first-hand experience and exploration of the locales and their culture. "8 Days in Real India" by *Nas Daily* is an eight-minute exploration into India's diverse culture and

traditions. Yassin approaches the nation as any other foreigner with certain assumptions and tries to find the other side of it. India, still a developing country is often perceived to be poor. Yassin says that India is “A country that you might think is poor, but is actually rich! Rich with people...with cultures they have more that a million gods and so many religions, even cricket is considered one. Rich with symbolism with food, flavours and colours. India is rich” (00:10-00:35). In this manner, he redefines the concept of poverty and hails each and every nuance of Indian culture. It is this fresher insight into the culture of the land that distinguishes *Nas Daily* from all other travelogues. Rather than just exploring and explaining, Yassin tries to live like an Indian for a span of twenty days. He highlights all the elements of Indian culture through first-hand experience. He explains how it is to marry like an Indian, eat like an Indian, pray like an Indian, study like an Indian and being poor like an Indian.

The one-minute video on Indian marriages captures the aura of festivity, colours, food, music and dance that form a part of Indian culture. Most significantly, Yassin also shows the other side of the coin that persuades Indians to marry only within the confines of caste, class and status. Yassin also cites the ubiquity of these restrictions in the world including his country. While approaching Varanasi in his effort to ‘pray like an Indian’, Yassin is perplexed about the Indian system which believes that bathing in a polluted river full of corpses is a path to salvation. His reaction is representative of the cultural shock encountered by foreigners in an alien land. Unlike other travelogues that often explores either the high culture or the low culture of a land; *Nas Daily* comprehends the true definition of culture and therefore gives equal importance to both. He describes Dharavi, the third largest slum in the world as the economic powerhouse of India. Dharavi is often taken for granted as a symbol of Indian poverty. However, Yassin concentrates on the hardworking nature of its inhabitants and proves that it is an asset to the industrial sector of the nation. Dharavi is considered as over-populated

and squalid. But, through his videos Yassin shows though the houses are located in crowded environs, they are indeed clean.

However, the observations of *Nas Daily* on Indian culture are not fully free from prejudices. India is a vast country of diverse cultures and languages. *Nas Daily* mainly focuses on the northern part of India, thus ignoring the indigenous cultures of the south, west, north-east and central India. In an attempt to eat like an Indian, he proclaims that Indian cuisine is mainly filled with vegetarian food. Though India is a 'heaven for vegetarians', he fails to understand the reality that only a small majority of the population is vegetarian and India has equally rich varieties of non-vegetarian food. Yassin also rationalises his finding that Indians are vegetarians by saying that as cows are revered in Hinduism, Indians usually do not eat beef. This gives an impression that nobody in India eats beef. But in reality, there are many Indians who prefer beef and many restaurants that serve it. In his attempts to eat like an Indian and pray like an Indian, Yassin follows the path of Hinduism. Though Hinduism is followed by many people in India, the land is rich with many other religions. The nation also promotes spirituality even without the backup of a religion. Unfortunately, he fails to notice this aspect of Indian culture.

Nas Daily's one-minute video on studying like an Indian is quite misleading. It gives an impression that all Indians are smart and aspire to be engineers. This ignores the life of many farmers who are smart enough and toils on the land and many other career options opted by Indians. Yassin also forms an impression that wearing bright clothes helps him to be an Indian. There are indeed many many Indians who prefer light clothes to bright ones. Defining it as a speciality of India, he ignores the fact that it is a matter of personal choice. So, though Yassin tries to be an Indian, as he says, he fails miserably and is often clouded by stereotypes in his attempts.

“8 Days in Real India” by *Nas Daily* is an example of the insights that a foreigner might gain from a cultural encounter. It also points towards the possible aberrations that strangers are prone to arrive at. Like any other traveller in an alien land, he arrives with certain presumptions, learns a lot through first-hand experiences and forms opinions of his own. But “8 Days in Real India” also proves that a traveller often arrives at false assumptions too in such cultural encounters.

A short analysis of three set of videos by *Nas Daily* namely, “World’s Extreme Countries”, “Planet Warriors” and “8 Days in Real India” was potent enough to drastic changes that travel narratives were subjected to with the advancement of technology. Improvements in mode of conveyance and the mode of communication made the process of travel and the documentation of the traveller’s inferences easier and effective. New media platforms provided a medium for everyone to share their thoughts irrespective of social and economic positions held by them.

From oral recounting and written accounts the form of travel narratives transformed a lot accommodating the possibility of including visuals, sound effects and other interactive media. The voluminous writings were cut down to even one-minute videos without affecting their impact. The primacy of written word in the conventional logocentric world is thus replaced by visuals. Traditionally travel writings either served as guides to various destinations or as fictional or non-fictional recountings of the explorer’s quests. *Nas Daily*, with their contents that shed a new light on the sights and sounds seen by the traveller demonstrated how travelogues can be used to uphold social and moral values. New media travel narratives went one-step forward in the study of culture by providing first-hand like knowledge to the viewers. *Nas Daily’s* travel in India also showed the possible insights and aberrations that a foreigner may end up with while encountering an unknown culture. The scope of this triple

deconstruction can be extended further to include several other changes that the travelogues underwent like that of ideology, documentation and many more.

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